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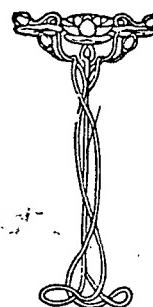
PIONEER DAYS

of the

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

in

Northern Alberta



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PIONEER DAYS
of the
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
in
NORTHERN ALBERTA
by
MRS. T. BELLAMY



FOR many years Fort Edmonton was a trading post of the Hudson's Bay Company. When the railway reached it in 1891 it began to grow rapidly, and great hopes for its future growth were reasonably based on business in sight. The fur trade of the north, mineral wealth in an unlimited supply of coal, the gold bearing gravel beds of the rivers, and chiefly the rich agricultural lands of Northern Alberta—all these were sources of prosperity. In 1892 many settlers were attracted to this strategic centre, among whom was Thomas Bellamy and his family who came from Winnipeg.

Edmonton was then but a scattered hamlet with many log houses. Here and there were business places, some of them still occupying their first log building. The Hudson's Bay fort was still intact, and situated directly south of the present Parliament buildings. There were no side walks, and very little to indicate that Edmonton would soon present such an appearance as it now does. The mail came in but once a week, and was always interesting; but the mail that brought to the Bellamy home three copies of the "Canadian Baptist" enclosed in a single wrapper was more particularly interesting. The labels showed one copy for Mr. Robt. Manson, and one for Mrs. John Kennedy, who lived at Poplar Lake, eight miles north of Edmonton. It was easy to locate Mr. Manson, as he was superintendent of the Sunday School held in the Presbyterian church. It was necessary to drive out into the country to deliver the paper to the Kennedys, who lived in a primitive log house with a sod roof. This was the first trip made in Northern Alberta in the interests of Baptist missions. Mr. Kennedy was not at home, and his wife was very loath to invite the strangers in; but when they showed the Baptist paper and explained how it came into their possession, she gave them a very hearty welcome, and assured them that her husband would soon be home. The Kennedys were very hospitable Irish people, and no visitor could leave the house without having tea with them. During the social hour the advisability of undertaking work on behalf of the Baptist denomination was discussed, and a mutual understanding was soon arrived

at. The Kennedys were invited to the Bellamy home on the following Tuesday evening, and they were to bring with them any other Baptists they could find, and the Bellamys were to make inquiries about those who lived in town. Thus it came about that on April 29th, 1892, the first meeting of the Baptists of Edmonton was held. Those present were: Douglas Petrie, the late Mrs. John Gainer, John Kennedy, Charles Alger of the Calgary Baptist Church, R. J. Manson, and Mr. and Mrs. Thos. Bellamy—seven persons in all—a scriptural number.

By request, Mr. Alger took the chair, and Thos. Bellamy was appointed secretary. The chairman asked if anyone had chosen a scripture lesson for this first meeting, and the 7th chapter of Judges was read. A prayer was offered by Mr. Manson, who asked that special guidance might be given at such an important time. The decision of the meeting was that the secretary should write to the Manitoba Mission Board, requesting that a missionary be sent. It was further decided, upon motion of Mrs. Bellamy and Mr. Alger, that a subscription list be opened for pastoral support, and a committee was appointed to secure pledges for weekly offerings. Thus a significant stand was taken at this first meeting—first, that a missionary be sent; second, that the people show their willingness to co-operate with him, and third, to adopt the scriptural method in their financial undertaking, namely, "Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store as God has prospered him."

There is something very suggestive about the word 'first.' It certainly has no antecedent, and most assuredly will be looked to in after years as a precedent. How important, then, that the foundation work be wisely and well done. If we desire that future generations should look to our work for a precedent, we should put our best efforts into it, and perform it with love and loyalty.

It was suggested that weekly prayer meetings be held, and Mrs. Bellamy offered the use of her home for the purpose. It may be interesting to say here that the Bellamy home was situated exactly where the Jas. Ramsey departmental store now stands. At that time not another house was in sight through the surrounding trees.

The first regular prayer meeting was held on May 3rd. It happened that about that time the Rev. Mellick, superintendent of missions, was in Calgary, being detained there while waiting

for telegrams; and having some time at his disposal, he wired Mr. Manson whether it would be worth while to come to Edmonton for one day only. The reply went back: "By all means, come." Thus, it fortunately happened that Mr. Mellick was at this first prayer meeting. The few who were there pondered God's own words: "Before they call I will answer, and while they are speaking, I will hear." At the close of the prayer service, a short business session was held, and Mr. Mellick expressed his pleasure at what had been done. A committee was then appointed to choose a building lot.

On June 27th, there was a meeting to hear the report of the committee, and there were present the following: Messrs. Kennedy, Ingram, Manson, Petrie, and Mr. and Mrs. Bellamy. It was unanimously decided to begin the weekly offerings on the Lord's Day, July 1st; and to organize as a church under the Manitoba and N.W.T. convention.

On the last Tuesday in September 1892, at the end of the prayer service, a meeting was held to discuss the advisability of organizing a Sunday school. Deacon D. C. Cameron, of the Winnipeg Baptist church was present, and occupied the chair. He gave a very inspiring address, and urged that we go forward with the project. Mrs. Bellamy moved, and Mrs. Gainer seconded, "That we organize a Sunday School on the first Lord's Day in October, at three o'clock in Ibbotson's Hall." Deacon Cameron gave the first contribution to the funds of the Sunday School, and Mr. Manson became the first superintendent. It was indeed a heroic stand for Mr. Manson to take—to leave the Presbyterian Sunday School, where he was so much appreciated and had such a helpful band of workers, to assume the leadership of a new school with only a few unknown and untried Baptists. Mr. Petrie, who had been a Bible class teacher in the same school, was also constrained by love and loyalty to the Master to cast in his lot with the new organization.

The school opened on the 1st day of October with an attendance of thirty-one. The following visitors were present: Rev. A. and Mrs. McDonald, Rev. Mitchell of Grafton, Dakota; and Mr. McDonald, spoke words of cheer and encouragement.

Some time previous, a mission circle had been organized with three members: Mrs. Gainer, Mrs. Beals and Mrs. Bellamy, being the first Baptist mission circle in Alberta, and in fact, the first women's missionary society of any denomination in the pro-

vince. The first offering was to foreign missions, and amounted to \$7.00. The circle visited the immigration hall and invited strangers to the prayer meeting and Sunday School; and also distributed parcels of religious literature in the adjacent country.

The mission circle was organized by Mrs. Bellamy in her own home on the 24th of May, 1892.

Mrs. Hanna Young was the first Baptist in Edmonton. However, she did not unite with the church until some six months after the organization.

Under the auspices of the Mission Circle, a missionary programme was prepared for the Sunday School, and on the first Sunday in each month, the children were trained to take part in the programme, and an offering was taken for missions.

At the first annual meeting of the Circle, the membership stood at twenty-four, and the offerings amounted to \$33.10.

The First Baptist Church of Edmonton, was organized on February 19th, 1893, in Robertson's Hall, which was located on Jasper Avenue East. Superintendent of Missions, H. G. Mellick, occupied the chair, and the charter members were: Douglas Petrie, Scotland; Mrs. John Gainer, formerly of Pilot Mound, Manitoba; Mrs. Charles Roberge, formerly of Winchester, Ontario; Mr. and Mrs. Robert Ritchie and their children, Will, Alice and Fred, formerly of Perth, Ontario; Mr. and Mrs. Stephen VanBuskirk, Onslow and Ceretta VanBuskirk; Mr. and Mrs. C. B. Beals, formerly of P. E. Island; Rosanne A. Rennick, formerly of Sulphur Springs, Arkansas; Mr. and Mrs. Thos. Bellamy, formerly of the First Baptist Church of Winnipeg; and Mr. and Mrs. John Kennedy, formerly of Stratford, Ontario—nineteen members in all. Robert Ritchie, Douglas Petrie, and John Kennedy became the first deacons; Thos. Bellamy, clerk and treasurer; Robert Manson, Sunday School superintendent; Mrs. Bellamy, organist; and Mr. and Mrs. Beals were appointed to take charge of the song service. A unanimous call was extended to that pioneer missionary, Alexander McDonald, of Grafton, Dakota, to become the pastor. He arrived in March, 1893, and found an active and enthusiastic church membership, some four or five applicants waiting for baptism, a good Sunday School, a mission circle, and other committees doing progressive work. The first regular church meeting was held on March 29th, with the pastor acting as chairman. Services were held at South Edmonton at 11. a.m. and at Edmonton at 7 p.m. each Sunday, and at Poplar Lake,

eight miles to the north, on every fourth Sunday. It was decided to erect a church as soon as the lot was paid for, and a firm stand was taken not to solicit funds outside the church membership. On June 1st, Mrs. Petrie, Mrs. Gardiner and Sarah James, were the first to receive baptism, the baptism taking place in the river near Fraser's mills. The day was a perfect June day, and hundreds of people had gathered on the banks of the noble Saskatchewan to witness the ceremony. The pastor stood in a carriage and gave a beautiful and most inspiring message on the last commission of Our Lord, stressing the point of who was to be baptized.

After many meetings and much discussion, the building committee recommended that a brick chapel 26 by 40 feet as to its main part, with an addition at the rear, 12 by 26 feet for a vestry, be built at a cost of about \$2,333.00. The pews came from Waterloo, Ontario, as well as the other furniture, including a pulpit, chairs, and communion table. The total cost of the building complete with the furnishings was \$3,300.29. The seating capacity was 200. The location was the most central of any church in the town. Rev. Alex. Grant, of Winnipeg, while acting as superintendent of missions made a visit to Edmonton, and expressed his great pleasure at seeing such an attractive chapel, which he regarded as the very best building erected at that time by Baptists in Manitoba or the North-West Territories. It certainly was a great monument to the faith in New Testament teachings for such a newly organized church, with so small a membership, and with such scanty financial means, to undertake such a Herculean task. The chapel was formally opened on January 28th, 1894, by Pastor Wise, of Calagry. The day of the opening, Deacon Petrie and his wife went to the church an hour before the service and spent the time in prayer, asking God's blessings upon the people that day.

The Women's Mission Board of Winnipeg, who at that time had an edifice fund, loaned \$400 to the Edmonton church to encourage building operations; and it was to be repaid when possible without interest.

From the inception of the church, a deep interest was manifested in missions; and an offering was taken quarterly for the various departments under the Manitoba Mission Board, namely, home, foreign, Grande Ligne, and Indian missions. The offerings of the church for the first year amounted to \$26.60; of the Sun-

day School, \$6.50; of the Mission Circle, \$33.10. making a total of \$66.20.

Deaconesses were appointed at the first annual meeting, being Mrs. Ritchie and Mrs. Bellamy.

Dean Ritchie presented to the church a silver communion service.

The attitude of the first Baptist church in Northern Alberta in regard to finances is worthy of mention at this point. By a unanimous vote the method adopted to raise funds for all purposes was free-will offerings according to Scriptural teaching. This decision of the church at its first annual meeting was adhered to for at least over twenty years, in fact, it has never been revoked.

The B.Y.P.U. was organized a short time after the arrival of Pastor McDonald and the meetings were held a half hour before the Sunday evening service.

At the close of the first year it became apparent that if satisfactory work was to be done in the town, a student should be sent to assist the pastor, who had been endeavoring to preach the gospel at many outside points that had hitherto had no services at all. Mr. McDonald was a man thoroughly imbued with missionary zeal.

SOUTH EDMONTON

South Edmonton became conscious of the need of a church organization; and so it was unanimously agreed to ask the Manitoba Mission Board to send another man as soon as possible for this important field. South Edmonton church was organized in March, 1895, two years after the First Church. Nineteen members received letters in order to unite there. Immediately after organization, the church requested Mr. McDonald to come to them as their pastor, and to take up some new appointments in the country to the south. At that time a number of people had come to South Edmonton, who had previously been members of Mr. McDonald's church in Grafton, Dakota.

The First Church appealed again and again for a student or pastor to be sent to them so that the church should not become discouraged and lose the ground already gained, assuring the Board that there was ample scope for two good men in the

Edmonton district, inasmuch as there were at least three outside stations asking for services. There were members of the church at Poplar Lake, Horse Hills, and Sturgeon River. The church received many letters from the Board stating that it was anxiously looking for a man; but that it seemed impossible to secure the right one. The Board suggested that the church itself call a pastor. In those days it was very difficult to get pulpit supplies. The deacons became weary in endeavoring to keep the Sunday evening service going; and it became a very serious question as to whether the church should not be closed until the arrival of a pastor. However, it was decided to maintain the services. The chapel was built for the purpose of worshipping God, and it was thought possible to meet together there in His name, and claim His promise without a preacher.

For a time the deacons took the evening service by turns; the B.Y.P.U. rendered valuable assistance, and the Mission Circle and Band also presented interesting programmes occasionally. Thus during the eleven months that the church was pastorless the Sunday evening services were regularly maintained. With indomitable courage the little congregation shouldered the financial burden left upon them. The men had been most loyal and generous in cancelling one bill after another until the floating debt had been practically wiped out. Then the treasurer announced that the interest on the mortgage would be due in a few months' time, and there was not a dollar on hand to meet it. One deacon suggested writing the Mission Board of the financial crisis, and asking it to take over the building. It was also pointed out that cold weather was approaching, and that a caretaker should be secured, but that the treasury was so depleted that it would be impossible to pay one. At once there came volunteers from among the men to do the firing each to take the job for a month, and the women agreed to do the cleaning. The women again came to the rescue, and offered to collect the interest on the mortgage. There were only two women in the town, along with some three or four girls of the Sunday School, who were members of the church. It was agreed to circulate a subscription list, but no man was expected to sign it. Pledges were made, without knowing where the money was to come from to redeem them. One German girl, a maid, gave \$5.00, and said that if anyone would knit mittens, she would buy them, and knew others who would buy also. Mr. and Mrs. Beals at that time were living on a farm at Sturgeon River. Mrs. Beals and her mother knitted the mittens, and added another \$5.00 to the fund. A girl of twelve

from the Sunday school blacked her father's boots, and he paid her the amount he would have paid up town, and she sold sage from the garden, and by various other means made up a contribution of \$5.00. One woman in the country donated a huge crock of butter; another gave from time to time the proceeds of the sale of a quarter of lamb. Mr. and Mrs. Petrie, who were at that time in Scotland, sent the money they had planned to spend on dentistry. There were many self-denial offerings, but they were freely given; and when all the pledges were in, there remained only twelve dollars to complete the amount required. Every available Baptist woman had been canvassed, and had responded nobly to the appeal. There the project halted. What more could be done? Nothing but to pray, and prayer was offered that the necessary amount might be forthcoming when due. Then followed a time of waiting. A letter was received from a girl who had left the town the previous year, taking her church letter with her, saying that she had loaned a certain woman in the town \$12.00, and though she had written repeatedly and asked for payment, she had received no reply; and that if the money could be collected, she would gladly donate it to the Church. It was not known to her that the women were then collecting money to pay the interest. The letter was taken to C. M. Woodworth, a lawyer; the bill was collected; and the interest was paid when due.

The church had been without a pastor for such a length of time that the consensus of opinion in the town was that there would never be another pastor, and that the few Baptists had undertaken more than they could carry out, and would have to suffer humiliation for their presumption. There were a few maids from German Baptist families who came regularly to our services. One of these girls applied to a lawyer's wife for a position, and was accepted. The mistress inquired, "Where do you attend church?" and the girl replied that she went to the Baptist church. "Oh, yes," said the woman, "that is always called the servant girl's church." "I suppose that even servant girls have souls," the maid replied.

Eventually the church extended a unanimous call to Rev. C. B. Freeman, which was accepted. He preached his first sermon on June 7th, 1896. The church had suffered through removals, deaths, and the loss of 24 members who had gone to unite with the church in Strathcona, thus leaving the parent church about where it was at the time of its organization in point of numerical strength—that is to say, with about 18 resident mem-

bers. Financially it was not as strong. There was, therefore, not much to encourage the new pastor. Mr. Freeman was a scholarly, cultured, Christian gentleman, and soon won the confidence and co-operation of his little flock. In 1897 he took charge of the Sunday school, and did much to advance it. He conducted a normal class of teachers which proved a great source of helpfulness. He was pre-eminently a teacher, and was also a most devoted pastor. Twice on each Sunday he preached in town; and twice a month at Sturgeon, 18 miles distant. In 1897 he organized a church at Sturgeon with 15 members; and in the winter he held special meetings there for two weeks with marked success, resulting in several additions to the church membership. This church gave promise of a bright future. Its great need was a student who could reside in the neighborhood, as more work was required than the Edmonton pastor could perform with justice to his own congregation.

During his term of five years of strenuous labor, with so little to inspire him and so few to work with, Mr. Freeman did much for the church in every way. There were many conversations among the young people. His wise counsel, his earnest endeavor, the beautiful spirit he manifested under the most trying circumstances, will never be forgotten by those who were associated with him.

In April, 1898, a Mission Band was organized with 12 children, and at the first annual meeting there were 38 members; and offerings for the year amounted to \$25.45. The first public missionary meeting held in the Baptist church was under the auspices of the Band. Eighteen children presented a pageant entitled, "Lighting up India," and Mr. Freeman gave a fine address on missions.

In May, 1901, Mr. Freeman resigned the pastorate, broken in health by the long, cold drives in the country. He was obliged to go to Banff for a rest prior to preaching his farewell sermon. During his absence, Rev. A. M. McDonald, of Medicine Hat, was sent by the Convention as a substitute. During his pastorate Mr. Freeman had married a Nova Scotia girl, and Mrs. Freeman proved to be a great help in all church activities. Mr. and Mrs. Freeman both left fragrant memory in the hearts and lives of the people to whom they said farewell.

Rev. A. M. McDonald was so young and boyish looking that many wondered if he would be equal to the difficult situation. However, his first sermon convinced even the doubting ones that

he was the right man in the right place. There had been a time of great commercial depression in Edmonton previous to his arrival. Many young people, particularly, had left the place. The first congregation that greeted Mr. McDonald numbered 22. After being with the church two or three months, his services proved so acceptable to the people that he was invited to become the pastor. The invitation was extended at the close of one of the regular prayer meetings. His reply was that we close the meeting by singing "Jesus, Saviour, pilot me," saying that this should be the prayer of all. After spending a month in the East visiting his parents, Mr. McDonald returned to Edmonton, and entered upon his duties in October, 1901. He was a man of outstanding ability, and presented the gospel in such an interesting and powerful manner that he won his way into the hearts and souls of all who listened to his message. His first year was difficult, as he was supersensitive to preaching to empty pews. The B. Y. P. U. wrote personal letters to friends inviting them to their meetings, giving the topic of discussion and the name of the leader. These invitations were generally responded to, and eventually helped to increase the attendance at the Sunday services.

In March, 1902, the debt on the chapel was paid off. In June of the same year the church became self-supporting. It was about that time that Mr. and Mrs. H. H. Hull came to the city and joined the church. The pastor's salary had been \$750.00, and was now increased to \$800.00.

The Convention of 1902 was held in Calgary, and the delegates from Edmonton were among the happiest and proudest who attended. Mr. McDonald was beloved by the young people, and the church came to be called the young man's church. The choir leader was a young man; the organist was a young man; little wonder that young men were attracted to the Baptist church. The building soon became too small to accommodate the crowds who came to the evening services. A wing was added to the building in October, and when it was seen that even then there was insufficient accommodation, a wing was added on the other side, thus practically doubling the seating capacity.

There were many conversions; many came into the church by letter, and all the activities of the church greatly increased. It was a time of prosperity in the city, and the First Baptist Church was proving itself a potent and permanent factor in the life of the city.

It was not long before the church spread those two wings,

and soared away to a new and better site, namely the corner of 102nd Street and 102nd Avenue. The corner stone of the present building was laid in 1905 by Rev. Patterson, of Calgary, and the building was formally opened in November, 1906, by Rev. John McNeill, of Winnipeg. At the opening service, Mr. McDonald made the statement previous to the offering, that he had heard from time to time a peculiar fault found with this church, a fault not often attached to churches, and he thought this the proper time to speak of it, namely, that the Baptist church never asked outsiders for financial support. He said he had been given several cheques unsolicited, and in each case the same question was asked, "Why do you not ask for donations to the new building?" He replied that this church was supported by free-will offerings only, and then went on to state that an opportunity was now given to all who wished to assist in the building fund. The amount placed on the plates that day was something over \$1,000.00, being the largest offering taken in the history of the church. The smallest was 35 cents, which was during the second year, while the church was pastorless.

The opening of the new church gave a great impetus to the Baptist cause in Edmonton. About this time Alberta became a Province and Edmonton became the capital city.

The McDonald memorial church was organized during the pastorate of Rev. A. M. McDonald. In 1906 the late Col. Edwards, a member of the First Church, asked permission to help organize a Sunday School in a private home on 96th Street, and it proved so successful that the school was moved to a tent on Syndicate Avenue. In September, 1907, the church was organized with 53 members.

In 1908, Mr. McDonald resigned after eight years of faithful work for the First Church. In January, 1909, Rev. Patterson succeeded him. He was a mature man, with extensive experience, and a good preacher. He came to a large congregation, and was able to hold it. He soon realized the need of special assistance in a church with such a large and scattered membership (the largest in the church's history), and with so many adherents. For a time he had an assistant pastor, and later a deaconess in the person of Miss Wilson, whose services proved invaluable. Under his ministry the evening services became so largely attended that it was necessary to increase the seating capacity of the building. A gallery was therefore built, and at the same time a steam heating plant was installed and some other improvements made

at a cost of about \$12,000,

When the war broke out the church suffered in common with others both financially and in point of membership. The pastor was the first one to reduce the budget by requesting a reduction of \$600 in salary.

In 1915, Mr. Patterson gave much time to the prohibition campaign, and was the chief speaker for prohibition throughout the province. The church gave him three months leave of absence with salary to work for the cause of temperance. Mr Patterson filled a prominent place in the life of the city, and worked harmoniously with all the clergymen of the different branches of the Christian Church. He resigned the pastorate in June, 1916. His successor was the Rev. Mr. Horseman from Morrisburg, U.S.A. He was a good preacher and a most enthusiastic pastor. He gave all his time and thought to the church, and made a strong endeavor to foster its social life. To him belongs the plan of grouping the membership in various circles, and this plan proved successful under his leadership, and is still continued to some degree. He and his estimable wife, on one evening each week, gave over their home to the entertaining of the different circles, so that the church members might become better acquainted with each other, and thus work more efficiently together. After the Americans entered the war, he desired to return to his own country, and he departed after a pastorate of less than two years.

The church remained pastorless for a year, and then Rev. G. A. Clark, who had been overseas on military service, responded to the call, and came to Edmonton in September, 1919. He was brimful of enthusiasm and energy, and his fearlessness and originality in the pulpit proved interesting and attractive, particularly to the young people. He remained for five years, and built up a congregation that taxed the seating capacity of the church. Mr. Clark was esteemed as a citizen, and was honored by his fellow ministers, being chairman of the Ministerial Association at the time of his departure from the city. His resignation was accepted in May, 1924, and he thereupon went to eastern universities to complete his studies.

Thirty-three years ago seven persons met in Edmonton to consider Baptist mission work in Northern Alberta. Today in this city alone, there are eight Baptist churches with approximately 2,000 members; nine Sunday Schools, with 1,500 scholars in attendance; and six mission circles with about 400 members. The

combined offerings from all departments of the Edmonton church for missions in its first year amounted \$66.60. The total amount contributed to missions in 1924 was \$3,300.00

What shall the future be—May the horizon be lifted, the vision broadened, and God's word be tested, "Bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove now herewith saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it." Malachi iii., 10.

Feb. 1925.

